

Religion, Science and the Future

A Conference Sponsored by the

[The International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*](#)

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary

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The University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

Since its founding in 2006 the ISSRNC has promoted critical enquiry into the complex relationships between human beings, the religious dimensions of their cultures, and the environments which they inhabit and from which they evolved. In 2007, it began to publish its affiliated, quarterly, peer-reviewed *[Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture](#)*. After its inaugural conference at the University of Florida, the ISSRNC sponsored conferences in Morelia, Mexico; Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Vatican City, Italy; Perth, Australia; Malibu, California; and Cape Town, South Africa. In 2016, the society will celebrate its 10th anniversary, and its highly successful quarterly journal, at the site where both were launched.

Call for Proposals & Papers

As an interdisciplinary society, the ISSRNC is interested in all aspects of the relations between what scholars variously construe as religion, nature and culture. Panels and paper proposals may address any aspect of the religion/nature/culture nexus, and focus on any time frame, space, or place. We especially encourage proposals that, whatever else they illuminate, reflect as well on **Religion, Science, and the Future**.

Scholars have, of course, long debated the future of religion and increasingly, the impact of science in that future. Some scholars believe that human religiosity is beginning to wane and will continue to do so as naturalistic, evolutionary understandings of human origins spread. Others assert that as a result of many millennia of evolution, the brain is predisposed to religious

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perception, that such perception has proven adaptive, and that it is very likely a permanent human trait. Still others believe that religion is often but not always adaptive and there is no guarantee of its long-term survival. If religion is to survive, so goes this line of thinking, it will need to be transformed through an earnest engagement with science. Much of the contemporary ferment over religion and science thus runs between two poles: Those who claim that religion is a regressive human trait and that its demise should be hastened, and those who believe that religion is a positive social force.

Those with a more positive appraisal sometimes also argue that the good ways religion can function could be enhanced if the human role in shaping religion were more fully recognized and indeed, consciously encouraged, to evolve in ways that cohere with our unfolding scientific understandings. Along these lines are scholars who focus on the synergistic relationships and emergent properties that they postulate exist at multiple levels (for example, quantum, chemical, and biological), and contend that understanding these relationships and properties are important to the human future and the potential, positive role that religion might play in it.

These are among the issues many of the sessions, including plenaries and keynotes, will engage. Additional highly relevant themes for the conference include:

- **Evolution, Religion and Science.** Evolutionary understandings have been both disruptive to longstanding religions, and bases for new forms of religious production. Many questions arise under this theme, such as: What can be said about the impact of evolutionary understandings on religions old and new? Why do religious individuals and organizations often resist scientific understandings such as those from evolutionary biology? Why is evolution not taught in some cultures, difficult to teach in others, and generally uncontroversial in yet others? A premise of this area of inquiry is that an evolutionary understanding is so fundamental to scientific knowledge that without it, any real engagement between science and religion will be impossible, because the science side will never be fully present.
- **Religion, Violence, and Neuroscience.** Can evolutionary biology and related sciences illuminate longstanding questions about the penchant for violence among human beings and the possibility of transcending it? Specifically, what does religion have to do with violence or its amelioration and what do our brains and our genome have to do with it, if anything? Given what we know scientifically about religion and science, what are the prospects for reducing violence in the human experience?
- **Religion and Science on Health and Well-Being.** Much research has focused on solving social problems by thinking about how to overcome dysfunctional and unhealthy individual, group, or systemic behavior. What makes for innovative, creative, resilient, and positive people, groups, and systems, generally receives far less scientific attention. Moreover, the role of religion is far too often ignored in such research. To what extent and how might religion consistently contribute to positive physical and emotional health, and thus to the well-being of people and their societies?

- **Religion, Science, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.** Indigenous understandings tend to be intertwined with religious beliefs and practices, and such knowledge systems have belatedly been recognized as grounded upon protracted, systematic observation and experimentation; in other words, on science. Western sciences such as ethnobiology and pharmacology now recognize the value in such knowledge for human physical and emotional well-being, but what are the epistemological and ethical dimensions of any effort to integrate indigenous knowledge with western scientific methodologies and understandings?
- **Consciousness, Mysticism, & Meditative Practice.** Scientists have been studying the efficacy of prayer, meditation, movement, breathing, and sound—as well as practices that some would label “spiritual,” “quasi-religious” or not religious at all, such as making and listening to drumming and music, or engaging in outdoor activities such as gardening, hiking, fly-fishing, kayaking, and surfing – on human physiological and affective states. Can—and if so, how—might such practices enhance creativity, happiness, and both physical and emotional health?
- **The Greening of Religion.** For centuries intellectuals have debated whether religion or specific religions hinder or promote this-worldly or extra-worldly concerns and corresponding ethics. Such debates have intensified as negative anthropogenic environmental changes have become widespread and obvious. Are the so-called world religions, or new and emerging ones, or new hybrids amalgamated in a *bricolage* of religious and scientific understandings, promoting environmental concern and reforming individual and collective behaviors in a way that promotes resilient environmental and social systems?
- **Religion and Nature in the Arts.** Religious beliefs and perceptions are typically expressed and promoted through the arts, which can be understood as technologies of the sacred that are designed to evoke proper spiritual perception and action. Yet much nature-related artistic production takes place outside of longstanding and self-consciously ‘religious’ cultural venues and enclaves. How do arts such as poetry, prose, music, theatre, cinema, painting and photography shape nature-related perceptions and practices, and what role are they likely to play in the future? How do the arts reflect, promote, or subvert scientific understandings of religion and nature?
- **Ethology, Botany, and Sentience.** What are the implications for religions and the religious future of emerging scientific understandings of sentience and consciousness among non-human organisms?

Proposals and Deadlines

Paper proposals should include two documents: The first, with Title, Name of Participant, contact information for participant(s), and an 150-word abstract. The second, with Title, a description of the paper including its methods and argument(s)/findings(s), in 500 words or less, plus a bibliography with relevant literature engaged. Session proposals should include paper

proposals for each participant as well as an overview document explaining the session title, theme, participants, titles, respondents, and order of presentation. Proposals for sessions or events that would not fit the traditional session format are encouraged and can be described in whatever way is most fitting.

Please submit attached documents in a commonly used format, such as word, rtf, pages, or pdf, to whitneyabauman@mac.com by 15 June 2015. Papers will be anonymously peer-reviewed by an international scholarly committee and decisions made by 15 July 2015.

Scholars whose papers are accepted and who would be unable to attend without financial support will have an opportunity to apply for modest, supplementary travel grants. Most such grants go to students with little funding available to them or scholars from institutions and countries with fewer resources for travel to international conferences. Scholars who will need letters of invitation in order to obtain a visa for travel to the United States must indicate this upon application. This process can often take considerable time so it should be undertaken upon the acceptance of proposals or papers.

All presenters must be members in good standing of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture by 1 September 2015. All scholars interested in the religion, nature and culture are encouraged to support the Society by joining or renewing at the [ISSRNC membership page](#). For more details and details, see the [detailed CFP](#).

Presenters and session organizers will be encouraged to submit their articles for publication, or their sessions for special issues, to the [*Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*](#). Further information about the society and journal can be found at www.religionandnature.com. Interested scholars are also encouraged to follow the [ISSRNC Facebook page](#) and [Twitter](#).